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ABSTRACT

The basic purpose of this study was to determine the effects of telling prospective teachers that a classroom of adolescents, viewed on video tape, were low-achieving students. An experimental group was informed that the adolescents were slow learners having considerable difficulty in school. A control group, observing the same video tape was told that they were regular students in a regular classroom. Analysis of covariance indicated that the teacher candidates in the experimental group perceived the videotaped students significantly more negatively than did the control group. Dogmatism level, academic major, and sex of subjects were found to be nonsignificant factors. (Author)

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# Labelling of Students

by

# Prospective Teachers

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## OBJECTIVES

The basic purpose of this study was to determine the effects of having prospective teachers being told that a classroom of adolescents, viewed in videotaped sequences, are low achieving students who have considerable difficulty in school.

Evidence indicates that educators are inclined to label students on academic, emotional and social behavior. Does this labelling also occur with college students who profess to be future teachers? It was hypothesized that teacher candidates would perceive on a videotape a "normal" class differently than a "low ability" group. It was also theorized that open minded subjects would be less inclined to label students than their more closed-minded counterparts.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The issue of labelling, defined as the process which consists of describing a specific group of persons, attracted considerable attention with the Rosenthal and Jackson (1968) study. They developed the thesis that teachers' expectations produce corresponding results in their students. Using elementary school age children as subjects, teachers were told that selected students were likely to show an "academic spurt." The labelled children significantly outgained the control (unlabelled) group in academic achievement. In a follow-up study, Finn (1972) suggested that the labelling process does not necessarily lead to differential student achievement. A critical first step must occur; namely, that data about students must affect the attitudes of the teachers toward those labelled. This study analyzed this portion of Finn's construct.

It was noted that previous labelling studies focused on teachers. However, labelling, if it occurs, may also be associated with prospective teachers, and it would be more meaningful to deal with this issue before subjects enter the profession.

Results of past research also indicated the labelling phenomena could be a function of personality development. This view appeared relevant in terms of the dogmatism thesis offered by Rokeach (1960). He proposed that dogmatism is consistently supported as a critical factor in predicting the differences between the behavior of open-and closed-minded individuals.

## METHODOLOGY

The treatment variable was the attitudes that prospective teachers held toward a videotaped low ability high school class of tenth graders. The 252 future teachers were divided into an experimental and control group. Thirteen classes of students participated. Since the subjects were randomly assigned by class section, one treatment category contained an extra section of subjects. Only the experimental group was informed that the adolescents shown on the videotape were slow learners or low ability students. The control group watched the same videotape, but were told that these youth were "regular students in a normal classroom." All the subjects were asked to view the 35 minute videotape containing 20 classroom episodes or "happenings." Following each of these 1-to 3 minute scenes, the subjects were asked to respond to written questions on a scale, Attitude Toward Students Scale (ATSS), which was constructed specifically for this study.

In addition to analyzing the effects of labelling, the relationships between expressed attitudes and other selected factors were investigated. Together with treatment, these factors were the independent variables analyzed by this study. The four main effects variables were: 1) treatment, 2) sex, 3) academic major, 4) subject dogmatism level, as

measured by the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale (DS). The subjects were placed into one of two DS groups, based on whether the subjects scored above or below the mean in this study.

The effects of these variables were analyzed by a four-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Additionally, two co-variates, subject age and grade point average, were tested. Attitudes expressed toward the high school pupils, as measured by the scale developed for this study, was the dependent variable. The probability level required for significance was .05.

## DATA SOURCES

### Data Producing Sample

The 252 subjects were upper division (junior and senior) undergraduates at Northern Illinois University. They were enrolled in their first professional course for which six semester hours of credit is awarded. They had expressed the desire to become secondary school teachers and met the College of Education requirements to enter the professional education programs.

### Attitude Toward Students Scale (ATSS)

To measure the attitudes of the subjects toward the students shown on videotape, a 20 item scale based on a like number of classroom episodes was constructed. The videotaped students were high school sophomores in a low ability "track" social studies class. They were videotaped for three consecutive days, and the tapes from these sessions were analyzed for incidents about which items for the ATSS could be formulated. Since the 20 taped scenes presented only selected samples of the class activity, the subjects had to speculate on the behavior of the videotaped students mostly from what they expected that a low ability high school youth would do next. Each of the 20 items provided negative and positive response alternatives to perceived student behavior. The uncorrected split-half reliability of the ATSS was .567. Corrected to full test, this figure was .723. While no objective measure of the validity of the ATSS has been made, evidence from related studies (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968: Swan, Frerichs, and Mueller, 1970) suggests that when pupils are labelled as slow learners, attitudes toward them become more negative.

### Dogmatism Scale (DS)

The Dogmatism Scale developed by Rokeach (1960) is a 40 item, forced choice, self report instrument. The primary purpose of the scale is to measure differences in open and closed minds among individuals. Rokeach examined various characteristics of open and closed systems and then devised statements to test these characteristics. For this study, the uncorrected split-half reliability estimate for the DS was .537. Corrected to full test, this figure was .699. Rokeach's evidence of validity of the DS is based largely on comparing supported Rokeach's evidence of validity.

## RESULTS

The results of the four-way ANCOVA presented on Table 1. It is noted that the treatment variable was statistically significant at the .01 level. The experimental group, who were presented the low ability label viewed the adolescents on the videotape more negatively than the control group who saw the videotape as a normal classroom setting. On the basis of responses to items on the ATSS, the experimental subjects tended to view the slow learners as less responsible, having less self control, more prone to rudeness, and showing less

capacity to engage in abstract (formal operations) level of discussion.

The other variable which was statistically significant was grade point average. GPA was a significant ($p < .05$) covariate of the attitude of the attitude scale (See Table 1). The correlations value between GPA and ATSS showed a positive relationship between GPA and expressed attitudes: the higher a subject's GPA, in general the more negative his attitude recorded on the ATSS.

It is observed on Table 1, that none of the other variables tested were statistically significant. It was theorized that the open-minded individual as measured by the Dogmatism Scale would be less prone to label students. Yet, the experimental and control groups had almost identical scores on this scale.

## IMPORTANCE OF STUDY

A critical factor in preparing elementary and secondary school teachers is in the area of having teachers and future mentors become more sensitive to labelling students. In fact, educators at all levels foster labelling when ascribing to students titles such as gifted, dull-normal, educationally disadvantaged, creative and delinquent prone. These terms are freely expressed with a paucity of supporting data. Labelling becomes more serious when it is applied to youth who find schools a place of frustration and limited success.

Previous research indicated that teachers labelled students, and this study gave evidence that this behavior is also characteristic of the prospective teachers who participated in this experiment. It would appear that the issue of labelling could be most profitable studied while they are enrolled in their teacher education program. Again, this study points out the need that teacher candidates must be more aware of the problems that the low achieving youth face in the typical classroom. A distressing finding in the study was the negative attitude toward the videotaped students by the higher GPA students.

Lastly, this experiment may point out the advantages of using television in ferreting out some hitherto hard-to-reach attitudes of teacher candidates. The stimulus of television may elicit attitudes that more conventional procedures were unable to identify.

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Table 1

Summary of Analysis of Covariance by Treatment, Sex, DS Level, and Academic Major on the Attitude Toward Students Scale

| Source | SS | DF | MS | F | Significance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Treatment (T) | 77.56956 | 1 | 77.56956 | 7.06922 | $p < .01$ |
| Dogmatism (R) | 2.30820 | 1 | 2.30820 | 0.21036 | n.s. |
| Sex (S) | 24.55703 | 1 | 24.55703 | 2.23798 | n.s. |
| Major (M) | 43.61175 | 3 | 14.53725 | 1.32484 | n.s. |
| T x R | 3.32850 | 1 | 3.32850 | 0.30334 | n.s. |
| T x S | 4.12601 | 1 | 4.12601 | 0.37602 | n.s. |
| T x M | 43.93106 | 3 | 14.64368 | 1.33454 | n.s. |
| R x S | 1.79081 | 1 | 1.79081 | 0.16320 | n.s. |
| R x M | 7.94435 | 3 | 2.64812 | 0.24133 | n.s. |
| S x M | 6.40979 | 3 | 2.13660 | 0.19472 | n.s. |
| T x R x S | 17.94268 | 1 | 17.94268 | 1.63519 | n.s. |
| T x R x M | 10.67451 | 3 | 3.55817 | 0.32427 | n.s. |
| T x S x M | 29.64180 | 3 | 9.88060 | 0.90046 | n.s. |
| R x S x M | 8.45056 | 3 | 2.81685 | 0.25671 | n.s. |
| T x R x S x M | 6.99760 | 3 | 2.33253 | 0.21257 | n.s. |
| Covariance Total | 59.40290 | 2 | 29.70145 | 2.70681 | n.s. |
| Covariance Age | 0.50418 | 1 | 0.50418 | 0.04595 | n.s. |
| Covariance GPA | 59.40288 | 1 | 59.40288 | 5.41362 | $p < .05$ |
| Error | 2172.62622 | 198 | 10.97286 | | |